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Papaya Nutrition Facts

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Though it resembles a tree, a papaya plant is actually an overgrown herb, known as an *herbaceous perennial*. Grown worldwide in tropical climates, papaya is believed to have originated in Mexico and Central America.

The most common use for papaya is to aid digestion. Papayas are the only natural source of papain, an effective natural digestive aid, which breaks down protein and cleanses the digestive track. This means less food settles into the metabolism and becomes fat, making papayas' natural digestive properties an advantage to people trying to lose weight — especially for people who may cheat on their diets, said Homero Levy de Barros, president and CEO, Caliman International.

But in addition to assisting the body in digestion, papayas pack a nutritional wallop. Known as a "nutritional masterpiece," papayas are rich in vitamin C, folate, and [potassium](#). They are also good sources of [fiber](#), vitamin A, vitamin E, the eye-saving carotenoids lutein and zeaxanthin, and [lycopene](#). A papaya has a lycopene level of about 2,000 ug per 100g (or 3,000 ug in one slice of papaya of 150g).

"You can debate which fruit is the number one in nutrition, depending upon a variety of factors," Levy de Barros said. "But for people who know the nutritional make-up of

fruit, certainly the papaya would be in the top three of almost everyone's list." Papayas have 33% more vitamin C and 50% more potassium than oranges with fewer calories. Papayas have 13 times more vitamin C and more than twice the potassium than apples. Papayas have four times more vitamin E than both apples and oranges.

Papayas vary in size, ranging from about 1 to 20 pounds and 7 to 20 inches long, depending on the variety. Eat about 2 cups of papaya daily.

A ripe papaya has a golden-yellow outer skin. On the inside, its flesh is smooth and silky with a deep yellow-orange or pinkish-orange color and a sweet-musky flavor. Its large center cavity is packed with small, round, black seeds, which are edible. Their peppery flavor tastes great in a salad or salsa or blended into sauces or salad dressings.

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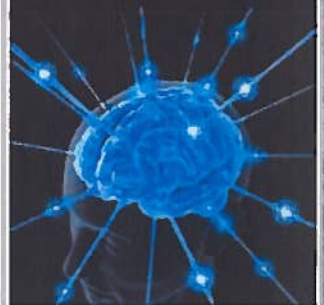
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